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SUBJECT: U.S. HUMANITARIAN DEMINING EFFORTS IN VIETNAM  
HAVING AN IMPACT

Ref: Hanoi 567

1. (U) Summary: The U.S.-funded VVAF survey project is underway, though it has also lost its project manager and will not be complete by September 30. U.S.-funded demining-related NGOs are operating successfully in Quang Binh and Quang Tri provinces and have generated goodwill towards the U.S. The demining community supports the landmine/UXO impact survey program. Provincial Army demining units are grateful for U.S. assistance and would like to see more, if possible. End Summary.

VVAF SURVEY PROJECT:  
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2. (U) Guy Rhodes, head of the U.S.-funded Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation UXO impact survey project (reftel) has left the organization, he confirmed in a meeting with poloff May 11. Alexander Reitveld, country representative for VVAF in Vietnam, has assured post the project continues to proceed. The survey staff is now fully trained, the systems are in place, and the manual is complete, he noted. Rhodes said the project staff is now in the field doing a pilot test of the survey protocol and systems, and so far everything is running smoothly. The survey itself is scheduled to begin in late May, Rhodes said.

3. (U) Rhodes' resignation will not affect the project, Reitveld said. Rhodes said he will still act in an advisory capacity as necessary, and Reitveld will handle the political side, including contact with the Ministry of Defense and the Vietnamese mine clearance agency, BOMICO. Michael Schenkman will continue handling the database, mapping and technical side, Reitveld said, and VVAF will hire a temporary person to do technical verification and evaluations in the field for one week a month.

4. (U) Reitveld, in a May 19 conversation with DAO, confirmed that the survey will not/not be complete by September 30, 2004. To complete, the survey would need to run until the end of February 2005, at an additional cost of USD 278,000. Reitveld stated that if there were additional delays or costs beyond February 2005, HQ VVAF would ensure the completion of the project at its own expense.

U.S. DEMINING ACTIVITIES HAVING AN IMPACT  
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5. (U) April 19-20, Poloff had discussions with Landmine Survivors Network (LSN) in Quang Binh province and with Mine Action Group (MAG) in Quang Tri. Poloff also discussed demining and UXO clearance with provincial political and military officials. The Vietnamese officials and the NGOs were in agreement that U.S. assistance in these highly affected provinces has been valuable and successful and urged it to continue.

LSN  
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6. (U) According to Landmine Survivors Network Coordinator Nguyen Hoa Hoc in Dong Hoi town, Quang Binh province, LSN has been operating in Quang Binh since February 2003 with a budget of USD 164,000. LSN uses that money to help rehabilitate disabled residents of six communes in Quang Binh. Hoc said that 80 percent of disabled people - mostly amputees - in the six project communes are victims of the war or of UXO. In general, Hoc noted, Quang Binh had a smaller number of UXO victims than Quang Tri. In 2003 in Quang Binh there were 30 UXO incidents, including 9 fatalities. Most of the victims were either children doing agricultural tasks such as tending water buffalo or farmers who built fires that detonated buried UXO, he said.

7. (U) Attitudes towards the U.S. have changed in Quang Binh in the last 5-7 years, he said. Previously, the U.S. was the target of a great deal of hard feelings, Hoc stated. Since then, however, "increased openness" and "improved relations", as well as the beginning of projects such as the

LSN project and MAG's clearance activities, had changed peoples' minds, he said. Hoc singled out MAG for particular praise, saying MAG had "cleared so much area, and freed so much land for development".

#### QUANG BINH PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS

18. (U) It was "vital" that MAG continued its work to open up land for development and use, said Colonel Phu Van Te of the Quang Binh Provincial Military Command in a meeting with Poloff on April 20. MAG also played a key role in coordinating district military and provincial military engineering teams, Te said. According to Hoc of LSN, MAG is also the main organization in the province for local-level UXO problems. When a farmer finds UXO, he contacts his district-level security forces, or the fire brigade, who contacts the provincial military, which either sends a team to clear the object or asks MAG to do it, Hoc and Te both said. Sometimes the province (or MAG) will send someone to cordon off the area until more is found so that the clearance teams can clear several sites in one area and thus save some time and transportation costs, Te acknowledged. Te said the longest wait for that service was about three days, and that the Provincial engineers had responded five times already in April. That unit's first priority is dealing with reported problems, and second is infrastructure projects, he noted.

#### MAG: SUPPORT THE VVAF SURVEY

19. (U) Nick Proudman, Program Manager of MAG in Quang Tri province said in a meeting with Poloff April 20 that MAG has one 12-man mobile team in Quang Binh (out of four total teams) with a province-wide mandate. That team received its taskings from the Provincial army, he said, and does "some" emergency clearance as necessary. He agreed with Col. Te that provincial teams doing emergency clearance are usually able to get to it within three days, assuming they are compensated for their gas and other daily expenses, and that the team is available. However, he acknowledged, Provincial army teams are "heavily tied up" with commercial clearance. MAG also had five twelve-man teams operating in Quang Tri doing area clearance in cooperation with the Provincial Government of Quang Tri as well as emergency clearance as needed, Proudman said. Proudman encouraged the USG to ensure that the VVAF survey was completed in Quang Tri. The survey, Proudman said, would enable NGOs like MAG, along with Provincial authorities, to make informed decisions about where to concentrate their clearance resources. The potential for resource savings was "huge", Proudman said, adding that occasionally MAG found itself wasting significant time and resources "clearing" a priority area that turned out to be only very lightly contaminated with UXO. The VVAF survey project would eliminate that kind of waste, Proudman said, and result in "major" cost and time savings to the organizations engaged in clearance.

110. (U) The political leadership of Quang Binh and Quang Tri both praised U.S. demining/UXO clearance efforts. Vice-Chairman of the Quang Binh People's Committee Dr. Nguyen Van Vinh told poloff April 20 that "work such as LSN and the VVAF survey project helps us upgrade and strengthen our relationship with the U.S. and overcome the consequences of war." He noted that the Province intended to contribute staff to the VVAF survey project. Director Hoang Dang Mai of the Quang Tri Department of Foreign Affairs also praised the work of U.S. NGOs (such as Peace Trees, a group that engages in Mine Risk Education (MRE) programs, environmental restoration, microcredit lending, and UXO clearance activities) and USG-funded clearance work by BOMICO and foreign NGOs such as MAG.

#### TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NEEDS

110. (U) Military clearance experts in both Quang Binh and Quang Tri said they appreciated U.S. assistance in the provision of equipment but noted they could always use more. Col. Te of Quang Binh said the province had one team of deminers using a TM88 Chinese-made metal detector for clearance at a depth of up to 50 cm. To clear areas to a depth greater than 50 cm, his team used G872 bomb detectors, he said, and in some cases they were given access to Vallon bomb detectors by BOMICO. Te had a varied list of equipment needs he asked the U.S. help him meet, all related to detection and clearance of UXO.

111. (U) In Quang Tri, the deputy commander of the provincial demining unit noted that his unit had detailed 10 engineers to Peace Trees, and maintained its own clearance unit. The Quang Tri Provincial Military Command had specialized clearance teams and non-specialized teams who were capable of conducting clearance activities if absolutely necessary, he said. The Quang Tri teams were in need of assistance in

repairing broken equipment, he added.

12. (U) Comment: These recent discussions with various stakeholders in the demining/UXO scene in Vietnam revealed three significant issues we had not understood clearly before. First, the "clearance community" (meaning those organizations involved in actually clearing mines and UXO) is highly supportive of the U.S.-funded VVAF survey project in Quang Tri as a way for them to focus their efforts where they are most needed, and thus save money and increase effectiveness. Second, the U.S. effort to support UXO clearance in the highly contaminated areas of Quang Binh and Quang Tri is both recognized and appreciated, by average citizens as well as the political leadership. And third, the "clearance community" is currently sufficiently large to handle emergency clearance needs as they come up, in a timely manner. Through continued engagement with the Ministry of Defense, the governments in highly affected areas, and the demining NGO community, we can refine our own approach to maximize the humanitarian benefits to the Vietnamese people and the impact on our bilateral relationship.

BURGHARDT